

LIQUID SPIRITS:
The (re)production of academic identities through
practices

A thesis submitted by

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Business
University of Technology, Sydney

2014

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mangoza', written in a cursive style.

Date: 11/08/2014

Acknowledgments

There is some rhetoric around the challenges of doing a PhD. This is undoubtedly an enterprise that requires a great deal of commitment and hard work. However I did not find the production of this dissertation a ‘herculean effort’ or a ‘descent into the underworld’. Even though I had to devote many weekends and evenings to my research, I found my doctoral studies an enjoyable, gratifying and stimulating journey. In part this was due to the fact that, as a mature student, I have been able to build on the experiences and the readings of half a lifetime. Still, what really made my PhD experience so pleasurable were the fabulous people who mentored and supported me; the ideal setting in which I was able to study and do research as well as the blissful presence of friends and family.

Even if this work bears only my signature, I believe that it is the result of a team effort, because it has been profoundly influenced by many stimulating conversations and productive exchanges of ideas. Here, I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to the many people who in one way or another made these three years such a fruitful and fulfilling experience, and name at least some of them, at the same time apologizing to those who I am failing to mention because of my imperfect memory.

In the first place, I want to acknowledge my supervisor (or should I say ‘my guru’), Stewart Clegg. He is the one who has inspired me and indefatigably helped me in my exploration of the academic life-world. One of the major drivers behind my decision to undertake my doctoral studies has been the chance to do research under the guidance of such a world-class scholar. In fact, convincing him to take me ‘under his wing’ has been the real accomplishment and all that followed was almost a walk in the park! His generosity in offering feedback and editing support, his expert counsel and his wise advice has enabled me to successfully complete this work without delay.

I must extend my gratitude for the guidance and feedback I received from my other two co-supervisors, Emanuel Josserand and Danielle Logue. They have been at the same time severe critics and encouraging guides, giving me many thought-provoking ideas. This thesis would have been far less polished and rich without their counsel.

I received a lot of invaluable insight from my conversations with a number of faculty members at UTS Business: I cannot list all the people who gave me useful ideas and information but I can name a few with whom the discussion has been particularly rich and fruitful: Walter Jarvis, Alison Errington, Ace Simpson, David Brown, Antoine Hermens, and Roy Green (a truly inspirational Dean). A special mention goes to all the informants, whose identity I cannot reveal, who shared with me their views, ideas and experiences: without their generous help this research would have not be possible. A special 'credit' is reserved for two people: Deborah Edwards, a precious source of clever advice and diligent help and Michele Lancione, a brilliant young scholar destined to become an academic superstar, of whom I cherish both the keen intellect and the warm friendship.

Outside the walls of UTS Business some other intellectual beacons have guided my way. In the first place Toni Schofield, a remarkable sociologist and a great friend, whose professional acumen and intellectual rigour had a great influence on me. A number of prominent international scholars have been great sources of inspiration thanks to their writings, and I had the good fortune of meeting and exchanging ideas with some of them. Although these encounters were often brief, they unfailingly gave me useful ideas and suggestions. Silvia Gherardi, Barbara Czarniawska, Mats Alvesson, Hugh Willmot are among these inspiring people.

Since I believe that body and mind, intellect and emotions, are not separated, I want to acknowledge also a group of people who might not have directly contributed to the 'technical'

content of my research but who are driving forces in my life: my friends. Among them I want to mention (in no particular order) Monica, Piero, Kerry & Kerri, Lane, Bliss, Sue & Craig, Deborah & John, Ian & Lorine, Margie &, Mark, Andres, Sonia, Ruth & The Mouse, Elisa, Susanna, Jackie, Zanie, Claudio, Susan, Anna & Tony, Giuliano & Martine (and many others): I could not have made it without you! An affectionate thought goes also to Carlo Romanelli, who I left alone navigating the treacherous seas of consulting.

In addition to individuals, I must also express my gratitude to two institutions. The first one is UTS (and in particular UTS Business). Despite the fact that some of my work is critical of this organization, my overall judgment of it is more than positive. Speaking as a 'student-customer' I can say that the services of UTS Business have exceeded my expectations; more importantly, I found this to be an extraordinarily innovative, open-minded and forward thinking intellectual environment. The other institution that I want to acknowledge is my new homeland, Australia. This nation has been exceedingly welcoming and generous to me, enabling me to fulfil what was an unexpressed potential. I plan to return this favour, and I hope that the farsighted policy that promoted and supported access to education for all Australians will not be repealed but reinforced.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this work to the most important influences in my life: my mum Iole and my dad Paolo. Neither of them has attended high school but despite this they taught me the love for education, culture and art, and at the same time they gifted me their enormous love and wisdom. I dedicate it also to the love of my life, my wife Cristiana, who is the real driving force behind all my accomplishments.

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Acronyms used in the text

AACSB:	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
AMBA:	Association of MBAs
ANT:	Actor Network Theory
AQF:	Australian Qualifications Framework
CFO:	Chief Financial Officer
DCCW	Dr Chau Chak Wing (Building)
EMBA:	Executive MBA
EQUIS:	European Quality Improvement System
ERA:	Excellence in Research for Australia
ERP:	Enterprise Resource Planning
ICT:	Information and Communications Technology
MBA:	Master in Business Administration
MDG:	Management Discipline Group
NPM	New Public Management
NSWIT:	New South Wales Institute of Technology
TEQSA:	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UTS:	University of Technology Sydney
UTSB:	UTS Business School
VET:	Vocational Education and Training

Abstract

Business schools have important social, economic and moral responsibilities, since their teaching and research influence managerial and entrepreneurial practices. A rich debate surrounds the characteristics and limitations of the current model of business education as well as what should be done now and in the future to create better managers and entrepreneurs. The intent of this research is to offer an original contribution to this discussion by investigating the factors that shape the behaviour of management academics.

Business Schools seek to capture not only the best knowledge, research and teaching in their ranks but also to direct it towards goal-oriented corporate purposes, whether in the pursuit of accreditation, rankings, or some other measure of 'excellence'. In doing so, they necessarily seek to shape and frame the activities, choices and performances of management academics. Some pertinent questions that arise in regards to their doing so are the following: are the behaviours of management and business school academics primarily shaped by their individual agency, by the managerial efforts of the organizations in which they are embedded or by other forces? What can be done to enhance collaboration or direct individual efforts towards specific goals? By addressing these questions, my thesis problematizes some assumptions that are implicit in the current debate, to which I propose alternatives.

The research adopts two theoretical lenses to pursue this objective, practice theory and social identity theory. These theories are used to interpret data on narrative accounts of professional identities and on the working practices of a group of management academics that operate in the context of a transforming business school. The sources of data include 72 questionnaires, 16 semi-structured interviews, as well as two years of ethnographic field observations. This 'micro' analysis is situated in the context of a large spectrum critical

analysis of the discursive landscape in which academic work is performed. This includes both a 'mapping' of the global Discourses of business education and of academic work (performed through a genealogic discourse analysis of the literature) and an examination of the local discourses characterizing the specific workplace of my informants.

By combining these multiple sources of information, this work depicts a representation of the life-world of management academics, one that includes social, technological, political, organizational and emotional forces. My findings demonstrate that the relationship between academic identities and practices is situated in a liminal space characterized by exposure to a variety of material, discursive and relational tensions. I suggest this induces liquefaction of academic identities, which I describe as 'liquid spirits'. As such, they are resistant to direct managerial supervision but remain 'bottled up' in facilitative circuits of power. In conclusion I suggest that, in order to 'organize' management academics' efforts productively, it is necessary to take this complexity into account and I offer some concrete example of possible (albeit not uncontroversial) alternatives to facilitate academic work.